

Role of Academic Staff College in Quality Assurance Programme

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The objective of Primary Education is to educate a learner in the three R's and impart such skills as would help him face the challenges of life more successfully than one who is illiterate. Secondary Education, which is wider in scope, is expected to make him aware of his position at home and in the world. It also enables him to interact and adjust with the larger world outside. For Higher Education, only the sky is the limit and it is an arena for advanced research, for testing the relevance of new ideas, for challenging the orthodox. In a word, it is a liberal field for healthy debate where all ideas are welcome, no idea is absolute. Therefore, College and University teachers who facilitate a learner's devoted attempt to attain higher education can never be complacent about their intellectual accomplishment, however fascinating their career track. They are required to constantly renew their scholarship and refurbish their intellect.

Now, since in range the field is ever expanding and its depth is bottomless, it is impossible even for the most dedicated to keep abreast of all the emerging frontiers of knowledge. More so, because time for reading is limited and available data remain inaccessible even in the digital version, thanks to computer-phobia of many students turned teachers. An Academic Staff College exists to address these needs of the academia.

Academic Staff College is the pride of a University. Every University is expected to create an ambience conducive to higher studies. The Post Graduate departments are mostly committed to field-specific study and research and its immediate stakeholders are the young learners,

many of whom, disappointingly enough, join Post Graduate courses because they are yet to find out their calling. Partly because they lack proper motivation and partly because of the careerist urge for high scores, Post Graduate students have little scope for going beyond the syllabus, however comprehensive.

Academic Staff College is a college, where teachers are getting scope to participate in exchanging their views with peer groups and interaction with the resource persons. Probably modelled on Administrative Staff Colleges of the country, it is different in its aim and scope. Whereas Administrative Staff College makes the new recruits conversant with the rules and functions attached to the post held, Academic Staff College is to give them academic directions so that through cultivation they might emerge as better teachers. Orientation Programmes are designed to give multiple relevant perspectives without any area-focus. This is not only because participants of an Orientation Course are a heterogeneous lot of young teachers who belong to diverse disciplines but because multiple perspectives are likely to create a mental make-up fit for higher academic pursuit expected from a college and university teacher. The target learners of a Refresher Course are mostly teachers of a single subject or, occasionally, of different subjects with overlapping frontiers. A Refresher Course is more focused in its aim and it gives attending teachers enough scope to update themselves about the latest trends in their subject. While Orientation Course extends the horizon, Refresher Course helps a teacher gain the required depth. Idealistically considered, these courses thus

enable a teacher to remove the rust of the intellect and together they guarantee quality output in teaching.

Needless to say Academic Staff College is the main tool for quality enhancement. The quality of varsity education depends upon the quality of its graduates and post-graduates and their quality depends a lot upon the brand of education made available to them by the Resource Persons. Since Academic Staff College makes a teacher more informed, its positive role in quality enhancement can hardly be exaggerated.

The aim of Higher Education is not only dissemination of the output of research, but developing the learning process. It is here that every Academic Staff College plays a pivotal role. By acquainting practicing teachers with the polemics and problematics of a topic it sensitizes them to delve deeper. Thus it acts as a catalyst in the development of learning process. Ours is an age of information explosion. Thanks to the Web Pages and Internet surfing, today "all materials", as Michael Hart once predicted, "are available to all patrons from all locations at all times". But the question is to sift useful learning material from a voluminous gigabyte of information. Academic Staff College acts as a guide in this respect, because by training the potential and practising teachers in the art of browsing and downloading target pages of digital information it empowers them to tap in the world of information through a click of the mouse.

Education is what survives when learning is forgotten, observed B.F. Skinner. If learning is the other name of quantity of information, true education – knowledge / wisdom – is associated with quality. So what ultimately matters is not the amount of information but the nature of information as well as how it is used for development of human resources. Academic Staff College gives teachers much scope to interact with

their peers in sister institutions and admittedly such interactions have greater leverage in higher academics since the interacting teacher feels positively inspired to hunt for knowledge without being deluded by the bewildering mess of information.

Higher Education never produces quantifiable social returns but acts as a mechanism for upward mobility of the entire society. To achieve this end one should not confuse it with tertiary education. UNESCO Report on Towards Knowledge Societies is very clear on this point: "Higher education differs from primary and secondary education not only in the age and level of the students but also in terms of the production and development of new knowledge in the cultural, social and economic spheres. Deprived of these functions of research, discovery and innovation, institutions of higher education are reduced to 'tertiary education' establishments, mere extensions of the primary and secondary levels". The Report warns us that semantic confusion between 'higher education' and 'tertiary education' may have serious consequences, for many developing countries may limit themselves 'to promoting tertiary education while believing them to be promoting higher education'. This noble objective of Higher Education mostly remains unfocussed at the Post Graduate level where even the teachers to whom the objective is clear enough feels handicapped within the straitjacket of the prescribed syllabus. By motivating practising teachers to cultivate the habits of independent, clear and systematic thinking, Academic Staff Colleges may assure the quality expected from an ideal institute of higher studies. Only Academic Staff College can make it clear to the participant-teachers that teaching and research are complementary activities: "without research, existing stock of knowledge will never grow ... without teaching, new generations will not be able

to acquire knowledge and skills created by their ancestors".

Last but not the least, quality comes from a positive attitude that has no room for complacency about what is being done. Every Academic Staff College should compare its activities with the best such institutes. For benchmarking periodic evaluation and assessment of its activities is a must, if possible, by accreditation agencies like NAAC. Besides, for functional improvement the following suggestions are worth exploring:

- Determination of Quality Parameter
- Collection and suitable utilization of feedback of each lecture
- Consideration of the opinion of the stakeholders in designing courses
- Confidence-building programmes which enable teachers to give their best
- Compulsory attendance for all teachers of at least one OP and one RC in a decade
- Greater premium on publication, recognition of post doctoral research activities
- Inspiring participants to bridge the gulf between institute and society in their capacity as teachers
- Inviting eminent educationists to share their knowledge and experience with cross section of teacher-participants

There are over 54 Academic Staff Colleges catering to the needs of scholars engaged in teaching in over 300 universities and 13,000 colleges of the country. If these colleges manage to orient their activities in the right direction, the quality of Higher Education in the country will definitely improve in the days to come.